

The Maine Community Exchange

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Ecotourism and
Nature-based
Tourism: Supporting
Rural Communities

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A Publication of USDA Rural Development in Maine



**Message from
USDA Rural
Development
Acting State
Director
Valarie C.
Flanders**

This issue of the Maine Community Exchange began with a specific focus on ecotourism. However as we engaged our partners in discussion, the bigger picture became clear: Ecotourism is simply a piece of the economic tourism puzzle in Maine.

We decided to expand our criteria to recognize the role of agriculture, recreation, and our natural resources as major drivers of Maine's rural communities.

In the articles that follow you will see the many ways organizations, businesses, and communities utilize Maine's natural resources to bring dollars into the state and build economic capacity.

Please enjoy this publication, which was developed under the guidance of our former State Director Michael W. Aube. It is with special thanks to him that we share it with you.

-Guest columns included in this publication are exclusively the views of the author.



Michael W. Aube



Funding Presentation: Joining Maine Alternative Agriculture Association President Paula Day (left center holding big check) were USDA Rural Development State Director Michael W. Aube (right center holding check), Representatives Deb McNeil of Senator Olympia J. Snowe's Office, and Michelle Michaud of Senator Susan M. Collins' Office (far right); and members of the Maine Alternative Agriculture Association Board.

Maine Alternative Agriculture Association held an Open House in September to celebrate an investment by USDA Rural Development and showcase the renovations to the former Starks Grange Hall where the Association resides.

The Association received a Rural Business Enterprise Grant in the amount of \$199,000 to fund the renovation of the 130 year-old building, which will provide a commercial kitchen for local farmers to add value to organic produce
(See Article by Paula Day on page 6)

Creating Opportunity and Preserving Value

By Thomas Dorr

USDA Rural Development is committed to increasing economic opportunity and improving the quality of life in rural communities. We are committed as well to a service ethic. Our role is to support and assist rural residents, communi-

ties and entrepreneurs in realizing their aspirations, in ways that they themselves choose.

Agri-tourism and ecotourism are gaining in prominence across the country, and rural Maine is no exception. Over the past decade, USDA Rural Development has invested more than \$97 million in loan guarantees, loans
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Thomas C. Dorr

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The Appalachian Mountain Club Maine Woods Initiative

Combining Recreation, Conservation Forestry, and Community Economic Development

By Walter Graff

December marks five years since the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) kicked off the Maine Woods Initiative (MWI) and purchased the 37,000 acre Katahdin Iron Works (KIW) property in the 100-Mile Wilderness region along the Appalachian Trail in central Maine.

The initiative is an innovative approach to land conservation that combines outdoor recreation, resource protection, sustainable forestry, and community partnerships.

“Our efforts have enjoyed broad community support, and we have worked in partnership with our neighbors in the region..”

-Walter Graff

economic needs of the Maine Woods by supporting local forest products jobs and traditional recreation, creating new multi-day back country recreational experiences for visitors, and attracting new nature-based tourism to the region.

AMC is committed to maintaining public access to the area, and it currently manages the 37,000 acre KIW property it purchased from International Paper in 2003 with the help of the Trust for Public Lands (TPL), the Governor's Office, and the State of Maine's Department of Conservation.

The AMC is also working with The Nature Conservancy and Plum Creek

Timber to purchase the 29,500 acre Roach Pond Tract, a critical recreational and ecological link that, once purchased, will be part of an uninterrupted corridor of conserved land stretching from the Katahdin Iron Works parcel to Baxter State Park.

Along with the KIW parcel, AMC purchased its first sporting camp, Little Lyford Pond Camps, in 2003. In 2006, AMC purchased Medawisla Wilderness Camps, along Second Roach Pond near Kokadjo. Partnering with West Branch Pond Camps owned by Eric and Mildred Stirling, AMC is able to offer the unique opportunity for visitors to enjoy camp-to-camp overnight cross country ski trips in the Maine Woods. Last winter, more than 20 groups took advantage of these camp-to-camp ski adventures.

Since opening Little Lyford Pond Camps under the AMC banner in the fall of 2003, occupancy has grown from 800 overnights to an expected 3,000 in 2008. In addition, we have built more than 50 miles of new hiking and cross-country ski trails, new campsites, and a new shelter for backpackers and fishermen. Sportsmen are welcome to fish and hunt on the property, which provides habitat for deer, moose, bear, and game birds. The property contains the headwaters of the West Branch of the Pleasant River, an area prized for its populations of wild brook trout, an increasing rarity in the East. To help protect that important fishery, the property includes a 10,000 acre ecological reserve.

AMC has also established a school program for local students, and has set a goal to reach every child in the Piscataquis County school system at least three times in his or her school career, with one of the visits being an overnight stay at an AMC destination.

AMC also harvests timber on the KIW property, working with Maine-based Huber Resources Corporation to implement a long-term, sustainable timber management plan, employing local crews and supplying wood to local mills.

Working directly with local communities is critical to the success of the project over the long term.

Many visitors to the AMC camps often spend their first or last night at a local inn or motel, as the traveling distance for people from away can be quite far. These visitors support the region's economy with local purchases and lodging stays.

In late 2009 we plan to open another sporting camp, the Leon and Lisa Gorman Camps at Chairback Mountain. With the addition of this newly renovated camp on Long Pond, AMC will be able to provide a four-night camp-to-camp trip, an exciting addition to our overall plan to bring greater economic stimulus to the region.

Our efforts have enjoyed broad community support, and we have worked in partnership with our neighbors in the region on such efforts as promoting the 100-Mile Wilderness Sled Dog Race, helping a local snowmobile club build a new connector trail, and working with the local Boy Scouts to provide opportunities to earn merit badges.

With more than a century and a quarter of experience in outdoor recreation and conservation, AMC is pleased to provide new opportunities for the public to explore and enjoy the outdoors through its Maine Woods Initiative.

More information on the Maine Woods Initiative is available online at www.outdoors.org/mwi.

-Walter Graff is the Deputy Director for the Appalachian Mountain Club, headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts.



The Inside View: Dover-Foxcroft Relies on Nature Tourism

By Jack Clukey

Dover-Foxcroft's economy has been tied to the natural environment since the area was settled and farmed in the early 1800's. By the second half of the century with the extension of the rail system into the community, the economy transitioned from agriculture to an industrial base, relying on trees and wool as lumber and textiles became drivers of the local economic engine. During this time, tourism was flourishing in the region particularly in Greenville as a summer destination for many in urban New England. Today our wood products industry is a major piece of the economy and tourism continues to be an important part of the economic landscape.

Nature tourists have many destinations in Dover-Foxcroft and Piscataquis County, including Mount Katahdin, Moosehead Lake, and State Parks at Sebec Lake in Dover-Foxcroft, and Lilly Bay in Greenville. Nature Tourists can explore Gulf Hagas or the 100 mile wilderness section of the Appalachian Trail and various waterfalls throughout Piscataquis County identified by Erik Stumpf in his "Waterfalls of Piscataquis" project.

Dover-Foxcroft and Piscataquis County have an abundance of destinations for nature tourists - But having an abundance of destinations doesn't necessarily result in an abundance of economic activity being generated. This issue was addressed in 2005 by the Piscataquis County Economic Development Council (PCEDC). In 2005, the PCEDC spoke to the fact that over the past two decades, numerous studies had been done in Piscataquis County regarding how to better develop and promote

its tourism assets. In 2005, a task force was formed to identify some tangible steps that the PCEDC and local and state partners could carry out to do a better job of allowing the vast abundance of tourism assets to ultimately translate into more income for local businesses.

After its year-long study the recommendations of the task force consisted of eight steps covering four broad categories: tourism capacity building, tourism business assistance, tourism product development, and tourism marketing linkages.

In terms of capacity building the task force spoke to the importance of establishing a local standing committee for tourism development and the need for ongoing efforts to secure resources for tourism development. Tourism business assistance called for efforts to be made to assess and address issues and opportunities facing tourism-based businesses in partnership with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Action steps for tourism product development and marketing linkages include finalizing a thematic Nature Tourism itinerary and publishing a guide-map for Piscataquis County-Maine Highlands. Partners for marketing tourism products were identified as the local Chambers of Commerce, Maine Highlands Corp., and Maine Office of Tourism.

In 2006, a partnership between the PCEDC Cultural Heritage Ecotourism Committee, the Appalachian Mountain Club and University of Maine Cooperative Extension produced a regional recreation map and guide for Piscataquis County. The map is a detailed inventory of recreational and tourism destinations in Piscataquis County. This product, like Erik Stumpf's waterfalls CD, allows a visitor of Piscataquis County to easily identify and locate tourism and recreational points of interest.

As described in the task force recommendations, a permanent standing committee of PCEDC was formed as the Piscataquis County Tourism Task Force (PTTF).



Jack Clukey

Chaired by Roger Merchant of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, the PTTF

put together a budget for building some of the infrastructure necessary to support the thematic Nature Tourism itinerary.

In 2007, the PTTF was co-funded by the County Commissioners and Maine Office of Tourism to construct signage and a web-based resource to make various destinations easier to locate and access by visitors.

While Dover-Foxcroft does not provide the bulk for the nature-based experiences, as a service center community Dover-Foxcroft provides amenities to support tourism. As Patrick Myers, Executive Director for Center Theatre, puts it, "Ecotourists use a town like Dover-Foxcroft as a jumping-off point to explore. When they return, they enjoy lodging in one of the area's bed and breakfasts or hotel/motels, eating in local restaurants, and enjoying a movie or play at the Center Theatre - all in Dover-Foxcroft. Some of these establishments, like the Center Theatre (which is a relatively new attraction in Dover-Foxcroft), have benefited from support from the USDA Rural Development's programs.

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Simple Solutions Derived from Place: A Bird in the Hand is Worth More

By Darrin Kelly

Sitting with my clients gazing at a magenta sunset over spruce-clad islands off the Washington County coast, the reasons why ecotourism makes sense seem obvious... Savoring seared scallops with leeks, tomatoes, and white sweet turnips while sipping a blueberry wine – all grown or harvested in my town of Gouldsboro – we are serenaded by harbor seals and bald eagles claiming their territory on this increasingly wild coast... Slumber in our tents will come quickly after a full day of “crawling for salamanders” across this National Wildlife Refuge island in support of a pilot project on amphibian genetic isolation...

Right Thing to Do?

With more training in counting seabirds than accounting, I started my ecotourism company with the simple, albeit naïve premise that the responsibility of sustainable businesses is to create solutions to local and global problems. Here on the border of Hancock and Washington County, we have a struggling resource-based economy of the three “f”s of forestry, fishing, and farming (aka. lobsters, wreaths and

blueberries). For guidance I looked away from the First World but instead to areas that have been able to diversify their economy with ecotourism - development like Costa Rica, Peru, and Kenya. These global case studies have shown that a “triple bottom line” - supporting ecological and social responsibility - creates profits.



Surviving economically in Downeast Maine has taught me a “jack of all trades” approach that results in a diversity of programming for Ardea EcoExpeditions. This includes day-long sea kayaking Acadia Ecotours and Custom Overnight Programs (including Paddle Inn and Natural History Weekend Packages) that build cash flow and a customer base to support our Research Expeditions.

Why do I buy food from my neighbors?

Not only because my conscience tells me it is the right thing to do but I’ve learned from my customers that it

is the right product for the market... The food tastes better and provides a richer, more meaningful connection to the place they are visiting when they meet the farmer or fisherman.

Why create “citizen science programming” to directly support local researchers and conservation organizations? Fifteen years as a guide and naturalist revealed a customer base who desired a more intimate vacation experience that connected them more fully to the magic of Downeast Maine - its people, flora and fauna.

Our Research Expeditions combine wildlife research, outdoor adventure, and ecology education to meet global marketplace demands for unique world-class experiences. Oh, and I’ve been able to expand my season and improve the local economy through collaborations with local lodging providers while supporting local conservation and community projects and strengthen justifications for wildlife and habitat protection in Downeast Maine.



Darrin Kelly

-Darrin Kelly is the Owner and Master Maine Guide for Ardea EcoExpeditions LLC, an ecotourism outfitter based in Gouldsboro, Maine.

The Maine Island Trail Association

By Kevin Lomangino

The Maine Island Trail is a 350-mile waterway extending from Cape Porpoise Harbor, Kennebunkport, on the west, to the Canadian Maritimes on the east. The Trail winds its way along the coast, around magnificent and exposed capes, through protected saltwater rivers and quiet bays, and among islands large and small. It includes over 160 islands and mainland

sites, all of which are available for day visits or overnight camping.

Since establishing the Maine Island Trail in 1988, the Maine Island Trail Association (MITA) has cared for the wild islands of coastal Maine by relying on a bond of trust between island owners and island visitors. In exchange for permission to visit the islands, owners receive assurance that MITA members will be educated in low-impact practices and their properties looked after by MITA volunteers.

MITA has volunteer Monitor Skippers who ply Trail waters daily over the

summer in MITA’s red Lund skiffs and Island Adopter volunteers who manage smaller numbers of local islands in their own watercraft.



Finally, volunteers participate in more than a dozen island cleanups along the Trail each year to ensure that each island is free of debris every spring and fall.

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Roving Reporter Rural Rover

Message from USDA Rural Development Mascot Rural Rover:

Welcome to my column, where you can find out answers to your questions on topics of interest to rural Maine- you might even say I have a "nose for news!" If you've never met me, I am Rural Development's Mascot, Rural Rover, and I travel around Maine sharing information about the Programs of USDA Rural Development. Don't be left in the doghouse- read my column!

This Issue Rural Rover Asks: What Can Be Done to Bring Ecotourism Dollars to Maine?



This issue, I met with Costas Christ, President of the Adventure Council and contributor for National Geographic Adventure magazine

Q. What are the benefits, both environmental and economical, to implementing ecotourism in Maine?

A. Maine tourism always has been, and still is, based upon the natural and cultural heritage of our State. The very fact that billboards do not line all of our roads, that many of our inns and hotels still retain their local character, and that a majority of our towns and villages still represent authenticity and sense of place – these are the very attributes of the future for Maine's tourism economy. They are at the heart of ecotourism, which calls for more responsible tourism development that protects nature and sustains the well-being of local communities. Ecotourism has also proved to be a major and growing part of the global tourism market. Likewise, we are seeing a major shift in the tourism industry towards more sustainable practices. Call it the new green standard. Given Maine's wilderness heritage and traditional way of life, we are in a position to benefit economically by embracing ecotourism and, in the process, we are protecting the very resources that can give us a sustainable tourism economy for generations to come.

Q. Can Maine do more to recognize its ecotourism potential?

A. Ecotourism emerged in the early 1990s and focuses mainly on nature and adventure activities. It gave rise to sustainable tourism over the last 10 years, which takes the same principles and practices of ecotourism – environmentally friendly operations, helping to protect nature, safeguarding cultural heritage, and supporting the local economy – and brings this into the mainstream tourism

industry - from urban hotels to ski resorts to all inclusive beach holidays. Maine should identify itself with and market itself as a sustainable tourism destination – a place that values its unspoiled landscapes, its rural way of life, and prides itself on protecting its heritage and sharing it with the rest of the world. This is our greatest tourism product. Let's celebrate what we have by committing to a sustainable tourism approach – which of course, in a pure business sense, means that we are protecting our tourism economy for the future by caring about how we develop tourism in the state today. Nature and cultural heritage are increasingly in short supply around the world as globalization creates more generic tourism brands and as more wilderness disappears from the planet. We have something special that is in demand in the national and global tourism economy. It is our market advantage, if we can grasp the opportunity and act on it now.



Costas Christ

Q. What kinds of things are other New England states doing that Maine is not?

A: In Moosalamoo, Vermont, they have engaged in a public-private partnership that has become an ecotourism model (it was given a major global award from National Geographic Society for its ecotourism innovation). Vermont has also launched a statewide program to protect its small towns and villages from commercial development that would detract from the traditional character of its communities. Its ski resorts, like Smuggler's Notch, are benchmarking best practices in green operations. In Rhode Island, the Blackstone Valley, one of the most economically depressed regions in New England, just won the World Travel and Tourism Council Tourism for Tomorrow Destination Stewardship Award- the equivalent of the Oscar in the tourism industry - for its sustainable tourism development model that has cleaned up the Blackstone River (once the most polluted mill river in North America) and is helping to revitalize former mill towns along the Blackstone Corridor. North of us in Canada, they are already heavily engaged in sustainable tourism planning as a tourism economic development strategy that has won them international attention. These awards and recognitions provide a marketing bonanza from major media attention that would cost millions of dollars in tourism destination promotion – and it is free in this case just by doing the right thing when it comes to sustainable tourism.

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Historic Farm Community; New Farm Market

By Paula Day

One of the most beautiful agricultural areas in central Maine is about to have a new outlet for local farm products. Starks, located on Rt. 43, halfway between Skowhegan and Farmington, like many small rural communities, has seen a significant decline in population and agricultural enterprise over the last four decades. But unlike many, it has retained what made it thrive in the past: mile after mile of farmland - still open and in production - with farms still intact as they were laid out in the original homestead plots of the 18th and early 19th centuries. And, in many cases, the original farm houses, barns, and outbuildings are still standing and in use there, too.

Over the years, these small farms – most of about 200 acres – have shifted from the self-sustaining homesteads of the early settlers, to diversified producers with a concentration on sheep, followed by sweet corn, then dairy, hay and feed corn. All of them originally included, and most still do, substantial woodlots for farm energy and building needs. Many of them border the Sandy River and enjoy the benefits of the richest, most productive (and rock free!) soils in Maine.

Today, while the population of Starks is a mere quarter of what it was a century ago and the absolute numbers of active farms greatly diminished, the town is home to a growing number of specialty vegetable and beef producers as well as a deer farm, two dairy farms (both small concerns with hereditary livestock lines going back generations), a thriving horse facility, and miles of productive hay land. It is also home to Maine Alternative Agriculture Association (MAAA).



Formed in 1999, by farmers in Starks and Mercer and one large animal veterinarian in Farmington, MAAA is a Maine non-profit organization with the mission of helping local farmers transition from commodities to high value niche crops and livestock products. It has purchased the defunct Grange Hall in Starks and is planning a collection/distribution point for local farm products there. With the help of a \$199,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant from the USDA Rural Development, MAAA also has plans to create

a commercial kitchen for a caterer and hopes to eventually be able to open a small restaurant in the facility – both preparing food grown or raised on local farms.

While construction and rehabilitation of the old building goes on for the next year, MAAA will work with farmers interested in growing goods specifically for the facility and we hope to develop parallel projects to support farmers moving into serious soils management for the production of the highest quality, most nutrient dense, crops possible. It is our belief that consumers willing to invest in local agriculture by buying their food locally deserve the absolute best that our farms can provide.

The old Grange building has been home to local farm organizations for over 130 years: first the Sandy River Agricultural Society, then the Starks Grange # 75, now Maine Alternative Agriculture Association. We're the new kid on the block, but we feel that we are somehow backed up by the generations of farmers who have gathered in that spot to discuss land, crops, weather, animals, equipment, and the day-to-day workings of a real farm community. And we feel really good about that.

-Paula Day is the President of Maine Alternative Agriculture Association located in Starks, Maine.

Sustainable Tourism Down East

By Gary Edwards

The Down East Resource Conservation and Development Area (DERC&D) is a partnership between USDA-NRCS and the Down East Resource Conservation and Development Council. The program works on economic and community development projects in Washington and Hancock Counties. Several organizations have been

working together on sustainable tourism projects for a number of years.

The Vacationland Resources Committee (VRC) is a group of business, environmental and planning professionals, extension agents, volunteers, and tourism providers, including DownEast & Acadia Regional Tourism (DART), working together on sustainable tourism projects downeast. The mission of the VRC is to preserve and protect the natural resources of Hancock and Washington Counties in Maine while promoting jobs, tourism, and the quality of life through cooperation, proper

planning, and management of our resources for generations to come.

In 1997, the VRC prepared the Down East Sustainable Tourism Initiative for the Year 2000 (DESTINY 2000). It is the result of an assessment of the needs, recommendations, and concerns of the Down East community; research into sustainable tourism strategies from other regions; and an inventory of resources and tourism operators.

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Gary Edwards

Sustainable Tourism Down East (continued from page 6)

DESTINY 2000 had five goals: economic development, ecological conservation, cultural preservation, local coordination, and education.

The VRC has implemented several of its strategies including the production of a Washington County Cultural Directory (2002) to match a similar directory in Hancock County. In 2003, the VRC broadened its membership and prepared DESTINY 2010 considerably expanding the scope and specificity of action items initiated by DESTINY 2000. This new document suggests 130 recommendations within 5 goals of sustainable tourism. Since completing DESTINY 2010 the VRC has sponsored workshops and conferences to encourage businesses to incorporate and highlight their sustainable practices. Throughout this process, tourism businesses and destinations identified a need for better access to resources for greening their operations and incorporating best practices in various aspects of sustainable tourism.

Since the publication of DESTINY 2010, the VRC has:

- Developed model itineraries linking sustainable businesses and natural and cultural sites throughout Hancock and Washington Counties (2005).
- Hosted a Workshop on Tourism Sustainability and opportunities for packaging in March 2006 (attendance over 100)
- Published a Resource Guide for Sustainable Tourism in Down East Maine and Southwest New Brunswick in 2007 - available on the DERC&D web site.
- Presented its work at several conferences including the International Eco-Tourism Conference in 2006, the Maine Smart Growth Conference in 2007 and the Annual Governor's Conference on Tourism in 2008.

Current Projects:

- Development of web-based maps and databases to link our region to other state agencies with tourism applications.
- Coordination of our efforts with consultants hired through the Maine Office of Tourism to establish a Nature-Based Tourism Initiative here and in other regions of the state.
- Updating the Resource Guide for Sustainable Tourism for a smaller region on Mount Desert Island.

A Workshop "Marketing Your DownEast Tourism Business" hosted by VRC and DART was held on November 13, 2008 to continue these initiatives and promote sustainable businesses in the region.

Down East & Acadia Regional Tourism (DART) is the official tourism marketing organization for Downeast Maine. DART is a sponsoring organization of DERC&D and is active on VRC. DART is made up of 19 active chamber and business non-profits. Its primary functions are to: market the DownEast & Acadia region as a tourist destination, support the tourism industry in the region by providing opportunities for collaboration, education, product development and other programs to strengthen the position of the DownEast & Acadia Region in the market, advocate for the wise use of the cultural, historical and natural resources in the Region, and to coordinate/cooperate with any organization that has similar goals within and outside the region, including the other MOT designated regions.

DART's funding comes from the Maine Office of Tourism, along with cash match and in-kind donations from its members and community supporters. DART uses this funding to get the most exposure for the region, while supporting local initiatives and enabling individual businesses to directly benefit as much as possible.

To accomplish its goals DART:

- Created three brochures which are sent to potential visitors and a brochure for distribution at travel shows. DART attends several travel shows each year as part of the Maine Pavilion. Through this effort DownEast & Acadia gets exposure in some of our regions key markets (NY, Boston, Washington, Canada) and market niches (adventure travel).
- Advertises in many publications with distribution in the major markets that are known to provide visitors to the region, including Maine Invites You, the primary fulfillment piece sent out by the state.
- Sets aside funds from the Maine Tourism Marketing Partnership Program to underwrite a DownEast & Acadia section in Maine Invites You. This enables small businesses and organizations to afford advertising in this high-profile publication.
- Manages a website (www.downeastacadia.com) to market the area. Businesses can post their information free of charge on this site as well as the State of Maine site.
- Periodically holds events to help train local service providers. Topics include marketing, hospitality training, public relations and customer service. Sessions are usually free of charge or at a very low cost
- Advertises in publications that reach our "drive markets" and "niche markets" driving traffic to the website and bringing people to the region
- The DART Logo is part of a branding effort that unites the region under one umbrella and creates a platform which businesses can use to market themselves or their local sub regions. All brochures, advertisements and website have the same look, with the same color-coded sub-regions, in an ongoing effort to create a brand recognition factor for DownEast & Acadia.

-Gary Edwards is Resource Conservation and Development Coordinator at the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Creating Opportunity and Preserving Value (continued from page 1)

and grants to support a wide variety of rural tourism related ventures across the nation ranging from wineries to pumpkin patches, bed and breakfasts, hiking, and snowmobile business ventures. The common denominator is that they help create jobs in rural areas while preserving a rural lifestyle and open space.

For example, in Maine, the Rangeley Lakes Cross Country Ski Club in Franklin County received a \$75,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant from Rural Development in 2006 to assist

in the creation of a 47-mile year-round trail system, a shelter, well, rest rooms and a parking lot. Eastern



A Rural Development-funded snowmobile trail groomer

Maine Snow Riders received grant funds to help pay for the purchase of a snowmobile trail groomer. The groomer is important to trail maintenance in an industry which supports many rural winter recreational jobs. These are just two examples of the more than 50 rural enterprises in

Maine that have partnered with Rural Development to provide tourism and recreational opportunities

As our nation grows, the attraction of ag and eco-tourism ventures is sure to increase. As Americans' living standards continue to rise, the value placed on a rural lifestyle grows, as does the capacity to pay for the services rural ventures offer. These ventures are effective tools for aligning property owners' economic interests with broader environmental goals. USDA Rural Development has tools that can help rural entrepreneurs create sustainable businesses in Maine. Our door is open.

This is a wonderful opportunity for many rural Maine communities and we are eager to help them succeed.

-Special thanks to USDA Rural Development Agriculture Under Secretary Thomas C. Dorr for his many years of service to rural America. Dorr contributed to this publication before retiring from the position in December 2008.

The Maine Island Trail Association (continued from page 4)

MITA complements these critical on-the-water activities with a robust program of mainland education and outreach. This includes distribution of printed materials - such as an annual Guide to the Trail, regular newsletters, and educational brochures - which encourage safe and environmentally responsible use of the islands. Efforts also include hands-on Leave No Trace seminars, informational booths at boating-oriented shows and events, and many other activities designed to educate and instruct potential island visitors. MITA is able to continue these educational opportunities through the generous support of members and donors.

The islands are different things to different people: a pristine oasis to step ashore and explore; a spectacular backdrop to the best cruising ground

in America; a part of the local heritage that must be protected. Whatever your perspective, MITA's care for the islands protects this legacy today and for future generations. Many of us share memories of the Maine coast in the summer from our own childhoods. Together, we can make sure that our children have the same opportunities we had to explore and care for the coast.

Ultimately, the MITA model - like the Trail itself - is fundamentally Maine. The islands themselves receive the attention and adoration of a caring constituency of people who love the wild coast of Maine. In the context of one of the state's greatest assets - its thousands of coastal islands - the Maine Island Trail Association uniquely combines recreational access to the coast, concern for the land, trust, volunteerism, and being good neighbors.

More information about MITA, including how to become a member and how to volunteer, is available at www.mita.org or by calling (207)761-8225.

-Kevin Lomangino is a Newsletter Editor with the Maine Island Trail Association



A little girl does her part to keep the environment clean

The Inside View: Dover-Foxcroft Relies on Nature Tourism (*continued from page 3*)

The Piscataquis Chamber of Commerce is one such service that is available in Dover-Foxcroft in its role as a “jumping off point” for tourists.

Visitors often stop in at the Chamber and learn about what Piscataquis County has to offer and how to find it. And according to Russ Page, the Executive Director of the Piscataquis Chamber, Piscataquis County has plenty of what people come here to find.

“Dover-Foxcroft and the surrounding communities in Piscataquis County don’t have Six Flags and Disney World, and people wouldn’t come if we did. What we do have is experiential eco and nature-based tourism. This includes hiking and fishing and canoeing and bird watching, but it also includes visits to working farms where our urban neighbors can gain the satisfaction of growing their own food and learning the fine art of milking a cow and the dangers of gathering eggs from the henhouse, says Page.

Looking into the future in terms of how the region continues to develop and market its tourism assets, there are many issues on the horizon that affect planning. Roger Merchant, of

the University of Maine Cooperative Extension notes that one of the many issues affecting the future of tourism in the region is climate change.

“Our neighbors in Canada foresee a decline in winter snowfall in the coming decades. Their research indicates that while ski resorts may be able to cope by making snow, the winter season will shorten. The Canadian Tourism Climate Change Report indicates that the vast number of longitudinal miles, thousands of miles of snowmobile trails in Canada, won’t fare as well nor will the associated businesses, says Merchant.

Another consideration for the future of tourism and the role it has in the local economy is fuel prices. High gas prices like those that were experienced earlier in 2008 led to a decrease in the amount of traveling. Yet, in Dover-Foxcroft, the annual Homecoming/Shiretown Festival experienced its best attendance in its 11 year history. One theory for this boom in attendance is that with fuel costs at their high, it was attractive just to stay home and enjoy the fun at the Dover-Foxcroft annual festival. This suggests that the future of tourism development and marketing might need to be focused just as intensively at those of us who live in the area who may opt to just get out and enjoy what we have in our own backyard.

There are plenty of opportunities to

grow tourism-based business “organically” by encouraging those who live here to enjoy the recreational offerings here and to spend money locally. And spending money locally can’t be emphasized enough by the Chamber.

As the Chamber kicked off its annual gift certificate program before the holidays, it was a reminder to us that when goods and services are purchased from locally-owned businesses three times as much money stays in the local economy. And when looking for that perfect vacation spot you don’t need to look very far.

According to Page, “Tourists come to experience nature, the wildlife, the peace and the quiet and the solitude. They come here to experience what they and their communities have long ago left behind. Giving it to them is good for our economy and our ecology.”

After all, isn’t that the tourism experience that many of those who live in Piscataquis County look for?

Oh, and this year’s theme for the Dover-Foxcroft Homecoming/Shiretown Festival? “Four Seasons of Fun for Everyone.” Where else could it be in a beautiful place like Dover-Foxcroft?

-Jack Clukey is the Town Manager in Dover-Foxcroft, Maine

Roving Reporter Rural Rover Interview with Costas Christ (Continued from page 5)

Q. Are there programs, resources and/or models in place that can assist in starting or encouraging ecotourism activities?

A. There are many best practice examples to learn from. Travel Green Wisconsin is a great statewide initiative aimed at promoting ecotourism in rural communities and, as mentioned, Vermont also has some very good models. There are a number of organizations that provide information on ecotourism best practices including Sustainable Travel International and The International Ecotourism Society. We do not have to recreate the wheel in Maine, but rather, tailor it to our local situation. The question is no longer does ecotourism work as a rural economic development and nature conservation strategy. It does. Rather, the question is how far can we take it?

Q. How much money is currently brought in to Maine by ecotourism dollars? How does this compare to other New England states?

A. There are no set statistics that separate “ecotourism” from other tourism revenue in Maine or the rest of New England to my knowledge. I think we can say with some confidence that many – if not most - tourists come to Maine to experience her natural environment and outdoor way of life. Given tourism as a whole brings in nearly \$6 billion a year in economic revenues for the state and employs over 70,000 according to the Maine Tourism Commission, we can conclude that protecting our environment is a key investment in our tourism economic future.

-Costas Christ is President of the Adventure Council and contributor for National Geographic Adventure Magazine

Definition of Ecotourism:

“Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.” -Definition according to *The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)* 1990.

Ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following ecotourism principles:

- minimize impact
- build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate

Source: *The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)* 1990.



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